



PRINT CULTURE AND ITS ROLE IN SOLVING THE BURNING PROBLEMS:- A CASE STUDY OF BANKURA TOWN.

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of newspapers and periodicals from small towns is not an accident. During the British period, many small towns were developed in different areas of Bengal for administrative and commercial reasons. Bankura is a town built in this way. Following the rules of urbanization, people of various professions came to Bankura town from surrounding areas very naturally. Some of these people used to publish these newspapers. Ramnath Mukhopadhyay, Bajendranath Bandyopadhyay, Avinash Chandra Das etc. were some such people in Bankura city. With the initiative of all these people, various newspapers started to be published in Bankura town. At the same time, various printing houses were established under their initiative. Various mythological and religious books were printed on the one hand and various newspapers were printed on the other hand from these printing presses. An attempt has been made here to shed light on what these newspapers used to write about and what kind of books or newspapers were printed from the printing houses.

KEYWORDS: Printing Press, Newspapers, Magazine, Editor, Starvation, Water Crisis, Economic Crisis

INTRODUCTION

Printing is a process by which text and images are reproduced from a master structure or standard. Woodblock printing began in China around 220 AD. Later developments included a printing system with easily changeable typefaces. Gutenberg introduced the mechanical movable type printing system in Europe in the 15th century. Its printing press played an important role in the development of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution, and it laid the foundation for the elements of the modern knowledge-based economy and spread education among the masses. From the 'Samachar Darpan' or 'Dikdarshan' of 1818 AD, Bengali newspapers are 200 years old. A large number of periodical newspapers were published during this period. And the main center of publication of these newspapers was initially in Calcutta. However, according to a statistic of 1873 AD, out of 36 newspapers published in Bengali language, 19 were from outside Calcutta.¹ Later this number of course increased much more. The emergence of such periodical newspapers from Mofswal is not a sudden phenomenon. During the British colonial period, several towns like Bankura emerged in different areas of Bengal for administrative and commercial reasons. Although there is considerable difference in their size and area, following the normal rules of urbanization, people of various professions came to these towns. And these people of various professions run municipalities, district boards, agricultural societies and publish periodical newspapers.

The first newspaper of Bankura district 'Bankura Darpan' was first published on 1st February 1892 AD. Its publisher-editor Ramnath Mukhopadhyay was a doctor by profession. The newspaper was first published as a fortnightly and later as a weekly. Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay mentioned that Ramnath

Mukhopadhyay was the editor of the newspaper during this long period from 1892 to 1937 AD. However, this information is not correct.² During this period many edited the magazine jointly with Ramnath Mukhopadhyay. Not only that, but also the editing of this magazine is known individually. In this case the names of several editors like Ram Ravi Mukhopadhyay and Biswanath Mukhopadhyay are found.³ In March 1891, Ramnath Mukhopadhyay announced the publication of this newspaper to the government. However, the magazine did not come out even after three months. Because at the very end of May of that year a Bengali daily wrote that Mukherjee Brothers had opened a printing press in Bankura and it was heard that the company would publish a newspaper. In 1893, Bankura Darpan had 360 customers. By 1895, the number of subscribers had increased to 500.⁴ Some have claimed that before 'Bankura Darpan', a newspaper called 'Bankura Hitaishi' was published under the initiative of Avinash Chandra Das of Nutanchati.⁵ But actually this magazine was first published in June 1897 AD. No trace of this newspaper is found after January 1898 AD. However, the number of subscribers of this newspaper was two hundred and fifty people.

'Bankura Darpan' newspaper was printed from Mukherjee Press in Bankura town. Sudhir Palit has written about three more printing houses namely Lakshmi Press, Mukherjee Press and Tara Press.⁶ Tara Press was owned by Bhuvan Mohan Rakshit and this press was started probably in 1928 AD. Initially the owner of Lakshmi Press was Ashutosh Das.⁷ In the 1930s, several more printing presses emerged in Bankura. 'Bankuralakshmi Press' (1923) owned by Banawarilal, Naranchandra and Shashankshekhar Bandyopadhyay in Beparihat Mahalla, 'Basanti Press' (1925) owned by Phelaram Pine, Rampad Das, 'Sulav Press' owned by Vijaykumar Dey in

Kerani Bazar or 'Kamala Press' owned by Gosthabehari Daripa are notable. That is, it is clearly understood that with the passage of time, the demand for the printing press was also increasing. Books of various tastes were printed. From the Mukherjee Press came out the 'Brihatsaravali' or 'Puransar Songroho'.⁸ 'Lakshmi Press' brought out 'Krittivasi Somossapuran' written by Krittivasa Karmakar, where the author solved the puzzling issues of various mythological facts. In 1939 'Tara Press' published 'Bankura Zila-Bhugol O Sonkhipto Bibiron' written by Kalikant Roy.⁹

Around the same time two more periodical newspapers were published from the town of Bankura under the editorship of Shashankshekhar Banerjee. These periodicals were i) Bankura-Lakshmi from Baisakh of 1329 (1922) and ii) Lakshmi from Kartik month of 1331 (1924). In the first year of Lakshmi, the third issue was printed 500.¹⁰ In 1331 (1924) under the initiative of the District Postal Association, 'Ekta' was published under the editorship of Pramod Kishore Sarkar. Although it was published to discuss postal workers, its scope seems to have been broadened later.¹¹ The April-May 1929 issue is said to cover various topics. It was printed from Lakshmi Press. Then the editor was Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay, he was a lawyer by profession.¹² By 1931-32 several other newspapers published from Bankura town have been found. Prominent among these are 'Abhay Shankha' of Sushilchandra Palit, 'Udaya' of Sanath Bhattacharya and 'Alok' of Baidyanath Ghosh. 'Bankura Shankha' and 'Bankura Sevak' were published under the editorship of Anil Baran Ray.¹³ A newspaper of 26 pages has been found dated 1348 (1941). It was edited by a woman named Sultana Begum.¹⁴ She was an active member of the Taruni Sangh of the town. Annadashankar Roy probably refers to this woman, who frequented his wife Leela Roy.¹⁵ At the same time, a fortnightly magazine called Supta was published by Dhiren Roychowdhury from the Deshbandhu Physical School in the city.¹⁶

Schools or colleges in the town also came forward to publish magazines. 'Jyotsna' was published under the editorship of Gopallal Dey from Bankura Christian Collegiate School.¹⁷ A magazine was also published from the district school. Rabindranath Chakraborty was the editor in 1941-42. The price of this magazine was one anna more than 'Jyotsna'.¹⁸ Bankura College Magazine is published under the editorship of Professor S. R. Ghosh of Christian College. Not only stories and poems written by students, high quality articles on various social issues were printed here.¹⁹ A newspaper named Yugdeep was published in the town to discuss all political issues. From the writings of Ramakrishna Das, it is known that by 1925, Kamalkrishna Ray came to Bankura and published this weekly paper.²⁰ In effect, this paper was the mouthpiece of the Hindu Sabha. A letter written by Anangakumar Neogi on behalf of the organization has hinted at it.²¹ Many periodicals were published in Bangladesh as mouthpieces of different societies. 'Tattvabodhini Patrika' under the initiative of Tattvabodhini Sabha, 'Hindu Ranjika' from Boalia Dharma Sabha, 'Aryabandhu' under the initiative of Aryadarshan Pracharini Sabha is his role model. In this context, 'Yugdeep' published under the initiative of Bankura Hindu Sabha, the

mouthpiece of Bankura Zilla Krishi and Hitasadhani Samiti 'Bankura-Lakshmi' and Postal Association's paper 'Ekta' may claim a mention. From 1892 to 1941 - in these 50 years at least six printing houses and 15/16 newspapers were published in the town. And none had a print run of less than 200/500. Students and teachers of schools and colleges also participated in the event. Within a few years, several other periodicals were published in the town. This initiative is definitely a symbol of middle class awakening.

Interest was there, but initiative was needed. It was accepted through Ramnath Mukhopadhyay. After that, there was no looking back. The middle class and print culture progressed in parallel, complementing each other. There was no lack of diversity in the newspaper. Education, literature, agriculture, medicine, women's associations, poverty allegation—all were there. All reflect the new social class's curiosity, interest and urge to develop itself. Almost all of the pre-independence newspapers published from Bankura have been lost. It is unfortunate that even in the library of Vadul, which is adjacent to the Bankura town, 'Bankura-Darpan' is far away and there are no newspapers published from the district during that period. According to the data of 1942, there were 491 Bengali books, 78 English books and a few periodicals - Basumati, Pravasi, Bharatvarsh, Desh and Dainik Yugantar. The town's paper was not even preserved in its own local library.

The publishers or editors of the town newspapers or periodicals were practically the guardians of the district. They became the hope of the district. Which is not worth less. Indifference of the local municipality, oligarchy, tiger hunting by the Jailor, Swadeshi meeting in the local market as well as the financial distress of the entire country or state, social development, nationalist movement or foreign news - all these were conveyed to the people. On April 15, 1892 (i.e. the first year), the Bankura Darpan highlighted the food crisis, water scarcity. The District Magistrate was reminded of his duties. The newspaper advised the Bankura District Board to follow the same way with which the Burdwan District Board dealt with the situation. The newspaper has reasonably mentioned the relationship between theft and robbery with this food crisis.²² The statement of 11 persons detained in Raipur police station in connection with a robbery has been quoted as saying that they were forced to commit the crime after going without food for four to five days. The editor expressed his opinion that the picture of the crisis of the district is proved from this. On the same day, an appeal was made in the form of a poem to welcome Chhotolat's visit to Bankura. But as that did not work, on 15th July 1892 Bankura-Darpan sadly wrote that the Lieutenant Governor in his speech praised the loyalty of Bankura residents and the roads of Bankura. But he wanted to know how people are? Did the authorities tell him everything? A month later the paper continued its criticism that no initiative had been taken to alleviate the plight of the people. Newspaper concerns did not always activate the government. Furthermore, while earlier reports of robberies were coming from the southern part of the district, on July 1, 1893 Bankura-Darpan wrote - Reports of robberies are coming from all parts of the district and the Government should take immediate action.²³

The way Bankura-Darpan printed the news of food crisis or economic crisis had a considerable influence on a section of the public and was able to create a conscious reading society. Many of whom used to write letters regularly. On January 15, 1893, one such letter was written by Trailokyanath Bandyopadhyay, Kunjibihari Roy and others regarding the shortage of food.²⁴ Not only in Bankura, but also in Calcutta, the news of death due to starvation created quite a sensation, a report in Bangavasi dated January 21, 1893 bears testimony to this. Referring to the news of starvation deaths in the letter sent from Rampur, the newspaper wrote - Lord Lytton openly said that the government would be responsible if even one person died of starvation. But Governor Lansdowne didn't mind. Frustrated by the indifference of the government to deal with this difficult situation, newspaper editors resorted to rich people. He asked them to come forward to help their distressed neighbors. In the words of the official translator - 'If they had been charitably disposed, the people would not have asked aid of government.'²⁵

Bankura-Lakshmi describes what the association did to find a permanent solution to the famine problem. Bankura-Lakshmi said, Gurusday Dutta became the District Magistrate in 1921 when the condition of Bankura was going from bad to worse due to various reasons. He understood that no development of the district is possible unless the agricultural societies are reorganized and revived. As a first step, the Health and Prosperity Exhibition was started in the city in February 1922. Acharya Prafullachandra Roy was the inaugurator. Here the results of unsanitary practices, the root causes of famine and its solutions, the importance of scientific approach and collective effort in the development of agriculture are presented to the people with the help of pictures, maps, drawings, magic lanterns. As there was no work by the District Agricultural Society, it was decided to set up its branch in every village. And the name of the association will also be reconstituted as District Agriculture and Benevolent Association.

Bankura-Darpan was concerned about the water crisis from the beginning. In this regard, the paper recommended that all the ponds in the district should be well dug. Sometimes the Government has also been appealed in this regard. However, the newspaper managed to create a sense of awareness even though almost no support was brought from the government. The trend that spread from the town to the village. The Bankura Central Cooperative Irrigation and Financing Bank Limited is created to establish water supply societies in different places and provide them with money. Thus the urban leaders, dismayed by the government, created a parallel trend. In a soft tone, along with criticism of the government, there was an attempt to build morale to go it alone. Acharya Prafullachandra Roy encouraged this ideal of the association. The work of the Agricultural and Benevolent Society is particularly commendable. By 1922, Samiti was established at 31 places in Bankura sub-division, including Simlapal, Velaidha or Ramsagar. There were three societies in Bankura police station - Mubarakpur, Ekteswar and Shanbanda. The Commissioner of Burdwan Division gave rapturous praise after visiting the main center and bank of the Agricultural and Benevolent Society in the town.

From the period of Bankura-Darpan the attitude or outlook of the town newspapers is very rational. They considered the matter from a scientific point of view. While discussing the crisis in the district, the very early Bankura-Darpan clearly pointed out that deforestation is one of the major causes of land infertility in the district. It continues even today. Bankura-Lakshmi revealed the speech given by District Magistrate Gurusday Dutta to warn people about this.²⁶

That is to say, print culture and newspapers undoubtedly played an important role in creating awareness among the people of Bankura town and district. Various newspapers of Bankura town on the one hand made the civil society aware and on the other hand presented various burning problems before the government and demanded its remedy. It has even been observed that in spite of raising various problems before the government, the newspapers did not hesitate to criticize the government in those cases where the government did not take any initiative to solve them. In a word it can be said that at that time the newspapers of Bankura town took a responsible role.

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